Luther's Brief Explanations of the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, and the Lord's Prayer

Translated by John N. Lenker (1907)

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Abbreviations

AE	*Luther's Works: The American Edition*, 55 vols. Concordia Publishing House and Fortress Press, St. Louis and Philadelphia, 1955-1985. Commonly called the American Edition.
PE	*Works of Martin Luther with Introductions and Notes*, 6 vols, A. J. Holman Company, Philadelphia, 1915-1932. Commonly called the Philadelphia Edition.
WA	Weimar Edition, Schriften, 72 vols., Weimar. The full title is *D. Martin Luthers Werke: kritische Gesamtausgabe*. It is also called the *Weimarer Ausgabe* (WA).
WA Tr.	Weimar Edition, Tischreden, 6 vols.
WA Br.	Weimar Edition, Briefwechsel, 18 vols.

Introduction

This little volume contains Luther's brief explanations of the Ten Commandments, the Apostle's Creed, and the Lord's Prayer. Each of these central Christian teachings was considered in Luther's time to be the foundation of popular education in the Church. This is still the case today, making them and Luther's explanations great introductory texts to Christianity and key Lutheran teachings such as salvation by grace, theology of the cross, and where the Christian community is able to be found.

The text of this work is from John Lenker's *Luther's Catechetical Writings* which contains unabridged English translations that have entered the public domain. They have been reformatted and archaic spellings and language have been updated for easier reading, but his translation has remained in its original state otherwise.

The original German text *Eine kurze Form der zehn Gebote, eine kurze Form des Glaubens, eine kurze Form des Vaterunsers* by Luther can be found at WA 7, (194) 204-229. These brief explanations were later included in a *Betbüchlein*, a prayer book, of 1522 (WA 10^{II}, [331] 376-407).

As you read these pastoral explanations, it is the editor's prayer that you deepen in discipleship and see the call to a Christian life in the usual events of a day. A Christian is never too elevated or revered to return to the golden basics of the Faith. It may truly be said that they are the sum and substance of our Lord's teachings.

I. The Ten Commandments.

Grace and peace to all my dear friends and brethren in Christ! Among the many injurious teachings and books by which Christians are misled and deceived, and through which a vast amount of unbelief has arisen, I consider not the least those little prayer books through which a great burden is foisted upon the simple-minded in the form of the confession and enumeration of sins, and much unchristian foolishness in the form of prayers to God and his saints.[1] Indulgences and red titles are the means of puffing these works of high-sounding names. One is called "*Hortulus Animae*," or "The Little Garden of the Soul"; another, "*Paradisus Animae*," or "The Soul's Paradise";[2] and so forth. Such books stand in need of a most thorough revision, or perhaps they should be entirely destroyed.[3] And this, I think, is true likewise of the passional and legendary books, in which we find many sections contributed by the devil.

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[1] On the invocation of saints, see *The Apology to the Augsburg Confession* XXI (IX).

For Luther's thoughts on penance see his *The Sacrament of Penance* (LW 35, [5] 9-22 | WA 2, [709] 714-723) and his *A Short Method of Confessing to the Priest, for the Use of Simple Folk* (LW 53, 116-118 | WA 30[I], 343-345 | PE 6, 215-216)

[2] These were the two most popular prayer books in Luther's time. For an example see Dörnhöffer's *Hortulus Animae* (Frankfurt: Baer, 1911). (The Catholic Encyclopedia. 7, 472)

[3] Although not a prayer book, Luther did choose to reform the liturgy, which included petitions to saints. He was continually concerned for the religion of the laity as the present work demonstrates.

But I have not the time for such work of revision, and it is too much for me alone. I shall be content, then, with such counsel as is here given until God shall give me time to do otherwise. I will begin with this simple Christian explanation, which is to be a mirror to enable us to see our sin, and to induce us to pray in harmony with the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer.

I am sure that a Christian has prayed sufficiently when he has rightly prayed the Lord's Prayer as often as he feels the need of prayer, the object of the prayer being what it may. For a good prayer does not consist in many words, but in the constant and earnest yearning of the soul for the Lord, as Christ teaches us in the sixth chapter of Matthew.[4]

I herewith beg of everyone to put aside the Brigette prayers and all those which are embellished with indulgences, or promises, and to return to this common, simple Christian prayer.[5] The more we practice it, the sweeter and the more delightful it becomes. To this may

[4] Matt. 6:7

[5] Certain prayers are said to have been given to St. Bridget (*ca.* 1304-1373) by Jesus while she was at the church of St. Paul in Rome and are popularly called the Fifteen O's after their beginning address. Bridget is said to have wanted to know the number of blows Christ received (5,480) and Christ responded with the suggestion to pray fifteen Our Fathers, fifteen Hail Marys, and the Fifteen O's each day for a year. The Fifteen O's were then featured in book of hours (see Luther's opinion of false private devotion above). Twenty-one superstitious promises were attached to the prayers, including: preservation from sudden death, deliverance of fifteen souls of the petitioner's lineage from purgatory, and a place in the angelic choir. Pope Urban VI (1378-1389) promoted her devotion, leading to Luther's later criticism and his calling her "*Die Tolle Brigit*" ("The foolish Bridget").

we be helped by the author of this prayer, our dear Lord Jesus Christ, blessed forever.[6] Amen.

Foreword.

Not without God's special design has it been ordained that the common Christian man who cannot read the Scriptures shall be taught the Ten Commandments, the Creed and the Lord's Prayer.[7] In these three parts assuredly is comprehended everything that is found in the Scriptures, and all necessary material for preaching, as also everything that a Christian should know. And it is so clearly and amply and withal so concisely and intelligibly set forth that nobody can object or excuse himself on the ground that it is too hard to remember what is needful for his salvation.

There are three things which a man must know in order to be saved:

First, he must know what he is to do and what he is to avoid. Second, when he realizes that he cannot of his own power do what is required of him, nor refrain from that which is forbidden, he must know where he should seek and find the power necessary. In the third place, he must know how to seek and find it. The sick man is a case in point. If he would recover he must first know the nature of his illness, and also what he may do and what he may not do. Then he must know where the remedy is to be found that will enable him to do as a healthy man does. Lastly, he must desire, seek and secure that remedy. By a similar process the commandments teach a man to recognize his

[6] Perhaps an implication that St. Bridget's claim that her prayers were from Christ is false and that Christians may be certain that the Lord's Prayer is truly from him.

[7] For the context of the laity's literacy and access to books, see Reu, M. *Luther's German Bible* (Columbus, Ohio: The Lutheran Book Concern, 1934), 72f.

malady, so that he realizes and experiences what he can do and what he cannot do, what he can avoid and what he cannot avoid, with the result that he recognizes himself as a sinful and wicked man.

Then, secondly, the Creed offers grace as a remedy and he is enabled to be godly and keep the commandments. It reveals God and his mercy, made available and offered through Christ.

Thirdly, the Lord's Prayer teaches him how to desire and seek this grace, and shows how to secure it, by means of regular, humble and comforting prayer. Thus grace shall be given to him and he shall be saved through the fulfilment of the commandments. These three things virtually comprise the entire Scriptures.

Accordingly we begin with the commandments, that they may teach us to recognize our sin and wickedness. This is the spiritual malady which prevents us doing, by commission and omission, as we ought.

The First Table of the Law.

The first and principal of Moses' two tables comprises the first three commandments, in which man is taught his duty to God both as to what he should do and what he should avoid. In other words, he is taught how to conduct himself toward God.

The first commandment teaches the right attitude of man's inmost heart toward God. Man's thoughts concerning God, his relations to him, and the reverence he should feel for him, are here set forth. He is taught to look to him for every blessing as to a father or a good friend; to show him fidelity, trust and love, with that constant fear which a child feels for its father, so that he may never be grieved. Even nature teaches us that there is a God who bestows every blessing and sends help in every trouble, which is also confirmed by the idolatry of the

heathen.[8] Accordingly we read: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me."

The second commandment teaches that man, in his conversation before others, and in the attitude of his heart as well, is to show honor for the name of God. For no one is able to interpret the divine nature either to himself or to others except by the names of God. Accordingly we read: "Thou shalt not take the name of Jehovah thy God in vain."

The third commandment teaches man's duty to God as expressed in deeds—in the public service of God. We read: "Thou shalt sanctify the holy day."

These three commandments teach man his obligation to God in thought, word and deed—in his entire life.

The Second Table of the Law.

The second table of Moses comprises the other seven commandments, in which is taught what man is obliged to do and what to avoid in relation to his fellow men and his neighbors.

The first commandment of the second table tells us how we are to conduct ourselves with reference to God's representatives, namely, those in authority. For this reason it is joined immediately to those commandments which have reference to God himself. This commandment refers to father and mother, spiritual and temporal rulers, and others. It reads as follows: "Thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother."

The second commandment prescribes man's attitude toward the person of his equal, or to his neighbor. We should not do him injury,

[8] The "idolatry of the heathen" is taken as reaching for God in Acts 17:26-27 (cf. Rom. 1:18-23 and Acts. 14:15-18). The theological concept here is called natural revelation and is treated in systematic theologies like Philip Melanchthon's *Loci Communes*.

but, as necessity requires, befriend and help him. It reads: "Thou shalt not kill."

The third commandment in this group sets forth our relation to that which, after his own person, is the most precious possession of our neighbor, namely, his spouse, child or friend. We are not to destroy their honor, but to safeguard it with all the power at our disposal. This commandment reads: "Thou shalt not commit adultery."

The fourth defines our duty to the temporal possessions of our neighbor. We are not to appropriate them nor to injure them; rather to protect them. It reads: "Thou shalt not steal."

The fifth sets forth our relation to our neighbor's good name and reputation. It should not be marred by us, but be enhanced, defended and safeguarded. It reads: "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor."

We are forbidden, then, to injure any of our neighbor's possessions; and we are enjoined to promote them. The very law of nature convinces us of the justice and equity inherent in every one of these commandments. Not one duty toward God and our neighbor is enjoined here on the fulfilment of which every man would not insist were he God, or in the place of God or his neighbor.

The last two commandments set forth the corruption of our nature; they demand absolute freedom from covetousness and the lusts of the flesh. However, that means war for us and toil, as long as we live. These commandments are: "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his man-servant, nor his maid-servant, nor his cattle, nor anything that is thy neighbor's."

A Brief Conclusion of the Ten Commandments.

Christ himself reduces the Ten Commandments to the precept: "In everything, then, do to others as you would have them do to you. For this is the Law and the Prophets," Matt. 7:12. No one desires ingratitude in return for his good deeds. No one will permit another to take liberties with his good name. No one desires to be a victim of another's pride. No one is pleased with the disobedience, anger or unchastity of his spouse. No one desires to be deprived of his property; and everyone objects to being belied, defrauded and slandered. What everyone does demand, however, on the part of his neighbor is love, friendship, gratitude, kindness, truth and loyalty. And that is precisely what the Ten Commandments enjoin.

How the Ten Commandments are Transgressed.

The First Commandment Transgressors:

He who seeks relief from trouble through sorcery, black art or through an alliance with the devil;

He who works charms through magic formulas, as signs, herbs, spells and incantations; he who handles the divining-rod, lifts treasure by enchantment, practices crystal-gazing or the use of the magic cloaks; also he who deprives cows of their milk by the use of magic;[9]

He who orders his work and life according to lucky and unlucky days, celestial signs and the utterances of fortunetellers;

He who protects and charms himself, his beasts, his house, his children or any possession whatever against wolves, weapons, fire,

[9] For a more comprehensive statement from Luther on the superstitious practices of his time, see his *Decem praecepta Wittenbergensi praedicata populo* ("*The Ten Commandments preached for the people of Wittenberg*") of 1518 (WA 1, 404).

water or injury of any kind by the use of prayers to which magical powers are attributed;

He who ascribes his troubles and adversities to the devil or to designing men, instead of receiving with love and praise all evil and all good as coming from God alone, and then making requital by showing gratitude and readier submission;

He who tempts God and rushes unnecessarily into peril of body or soul;

He who prides himself upon his godliness, wisdom or other spiritual gifts;

He who honors God and the saints merely for the sake of temporal advantage, forgetting the needs of the soul;

He who does not unfalteringly trust in God nor in all his undertakings put his confidence in divine mercy;

He whose faith wavers, or who doubts God's mercy;

He who does not, to the best of his ability, seek to safeguard others against unbelief and doubt, or to help them to attain faith and trust in God's grace.

Every species of unbelief, despair and misbelief belongs to this category of sins.

The Second Commandment Transgressors:

He who swears unnecessarily or frivolously;

He who takes a false oath or breaks his vow;

He who vows or swears to do something wrong;

He who curses by the name of God;

He who indulges in silly talk concerning God or recklessly perverts the words of Scripture;

He who fails to call upon the name of God in the time of trouble and to praise him in evil days and in good days, in adversity and in prosperity;

He who seeks glory, honor and fame through his piety, wisdom or other endowments;

He who engages in a false worship of God, as is done by the heretics and all vain-glorious saints;

He who does not praise the name of the Lord regardless of what comes to pass;

He who does not oppose others who abuse and revile the name of God or use it for evil ends.

The Third Commandment Transgressors:

He who makes the Lord's day an occasion for gluttony, carousing, gambling, dancing, lounging about or whoring;

He who is given to idleness and he who sleeps when he should be at divine service; also he who gads about or gossips instead of attending worship;

He who works or trades without necessity;

He who does not pray and meditate upon the sufferings of Christ, nor repent of his sin and plead for grace, celebrating the day solely by dressing, eating and a formal observance;

He who amid his toils and tribulations is not resigned to the dispensations of Providence;

He who is rather a help than an obstacle to others in living contrary to this commandment.

Also sluggishness in matters pertaining to God's service comes under this head.

The Fourth Commandment Transgressors:

He who is ashamed of his parents because of their poverty, their infirmity or their humble station;

He who does not supply them with the necessary food and clothing;

Even more grossly disobeys he who curses, strikes, slanders, hates them or refuses to obey;

He who does not reverence them in his heart as God commands;

He who does not honor them even when they act unjustly or harshly;

He who does not give heed to the commandments of the Christian Church in reference to fasts, holy days and other things;

He who fails to respect, slanders or grieves the office of the ministry;

He who does not honor, follow and obey his master or ruler, whether he be good or bad;

Among such transgressors are found all heretics, rebels, apostates, fugitives from justice, the obdurate and others. They transgress it who fail either to promote respect for it or to oppose its enemies.

All pride and disobedience are condemned here.

The Fifth Commandment Transgressors:

He who provokes his neighbor to anger;

He who says "Raca"[10] to his neighbor, which implies all manner of anger and hatred;

He who says "*Fatue*"[11]—"you fool." To this category belong all utterances directed against the neighbor which imply contumely, profane invective, abuse, slander, the imputation of evil motives, the sitting in judgment upon others, ridicule and the like.

He who criticizes the sins and infirmities of a neighbor instead of covering and excusing them;

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[10] Matt. 5:22 (BSB): "...anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' will be subject to the Sanhedrin." 'Raca' was a Greek term of abuse and is sometimes given in English translations of the Bible as "...whoever insults his brother..."

[11] This is the Latin word *fatuus* (Eng.: fool, idiot, stupid) declined into the vocative case, the case for addressing another.

He who does not forgive an enemy, nor pray for him, befriend and help him.

Here are to be mentioned all sins of anger and hatred, such as murder, war, pillage, arson, strife, contention, envy, malicious joy at the sufferings of others.

Furthermore, he transgresses this commandment who is averse to works of mercy, even though this spirit is manifested only against an enemy;

He who sets people by the ears and stirs up trouble;

He who creates discord among people;

He who does not seek to reconcile those who are estranged;

He who does not oppose and prevent passion and contention wherever possible.

The Sixth Commandment Transgressors:

He who ruins a virgin, commits adultery, incest or any unchaste act;

He who makes use of unnatural ways or people (that is, silent sins);[12]

He who by impure conversation, songs, stories or pictures incites and evinces evil lust;

He who arouses his passions and pollutes himself by unlawful objects of vision or touch, by thought or suggestion.

He who fails to remove the causes of the evil under consideration: intemperate eating and drinking, sluggishness, aversion to work, late rising and undue familiarity between man and woman;

[12] *Stummen sunde* ("silent sins") is a German translation of the Latin phrase *peccata muta*, a term for acts of sodomy. Lenker's translation has been revised here to more accurately reflect Luther's language.

The person who arouses the passions of others by lewd dress or gestures;

He who acts as accessory for others by offering the use of his house or by furnishing shelter, help and opportunity to commit this sin;

He who does not, in word and deed, safeguard the chastity of others.

The Seventh Commandment Transgressors:

He who is a thief, a robber, a miser or a usurer;

He who employs false weights and measures, or misrepresents his goods;

He who acquires a legacy, and he who levies taxes by unrighteous methods.

He who withholds from the laborer his hire, and he who repudiates his debt;

He who refuses to lend to a neighbor when he is in need, or exacts interest from such a one;

He who is guilty of avarice and eager for wealth; he who refuses to surrender the property of others, or receives stolen goods;

He who does not seek to avert injury from others;

He who does not warn others against injury;

He who deprives his neighbor of his legitimate profit;

He who looks upon his neighbor's success with envy.

The Eighth Commandment Transgressors:

He who conceals and suppresses the truth before a tribunal of justice;

He who compasses another man's injury by falsehood and deception.

Here belong the vicious flatterers, tale-bearers and the double-faced;

Also those who search the righteous life, deeds and words of a neighbor for occasion to misrepresent and slander him;

He who gives ear to evil tongues and encourages rather than opposes them;

He who does not employ his tongue to protect the good name of his neighbor;

He who does not rebuke the slanderer;

He who does not make it his rule to speak well of everybody and to conceal what is evil;

He who fails to champion the truth but suppresses it.

The Last Two Commandments

are not an element of confession, but the aim and ideal we are to reach, and toward which we are to strive by the help and power of God. For concupiscence will not be entirely dead until the flesh has been ground to dust and a new creation experienced.[13]

The five senses receive attention in the fifth and the sixth commandments.

The works of mercy, of which we distinguish six kinds,[14] are found in the fifth and the seventh commandments.

Of the seven mortal sins, pride is treated in the first and the second; unchastity in the sixth; anger and hatred in the fifth; gluttony in the sixth; laziness in the third and probably in all the others.

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[13] That is, after one has died and Christ returns with the New Earth and New Jerusalem (Rev. 21-22).

[14] The Six Works of Mercy are those which Christ enumerated in Matt. 25:35-36. A seventh was later added from the apocryphal book of Tobit (1:16-17). These are now regarded specifically as corporeal works of mercy since, after Luther's time, at the Council of Trent (1566) seven spiritual works were also officially given.

The sin of complicity is condemned in every commandment, inasmuch as by directing, advising and abetting others, every commandment may be violated.

The crying and the silent sins[15] are comprehended in the fifth, the sixth and the seventh commandments.

All doings of this character evince grossest love of self, which seeks its own, takes from God and the neighbor what is theirs, while its possessions, its nature, and its powers redound neither to the benefit of God nor to that of men. Augustine may well say, "Self-love is the beginning of all sin."[16]

From all this it follows that the commandments enjoin nothing but love, and all they prohibit is love. Only love fulfils the commandments, and only love transgresses them. For this reason Paul says, "Love is the fulfilling of every commandment." With equal truth may it be said that a wicked love is the cause of every transgression of a commandment.

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[15] The Crying Sins are those four sins that cry to Heaven for vengeance. Each is associated with a certain Biblical passage that describes their ascent to Heaven: murder (Gen. 4:8-10), sodomy (Gen. 19:4f., 13; cf. Jude 7), oppression of the poor (Ex. 2:23-25), and deceiving or taking advantage of a laborer (James 5:4).

[16] This is a quotation of Sirach 10:13 which is frequently mentioned by Augustine. E.g. in his *City of God* 12.6 ("And if we ask the cause of the misery of the bad, it occurs to us, and not unreasonably, that they are miserable because they have forsaken Him who supremely is, and have turned to themselves... And this vice, what else is it called than pride?") and 14.13 ("Our first parents fell into open disobedience because already they were secretly corrupted; for the evil act had never been done had not an evil will preceded it. And what is the origin of our evil will but pride?").

The Fulfilment of the Ten Commandments.

Of the First: The fear and love of God joined to the right faith; absolute reliance upon God in all undertakings; the maintenance of a spirit of perfect resignation whether what betides is good or ill.

All that the Scriptures teach concerning faith, hope and the fear of God is here found in rudimentary form.

Of the Second: Praise, honor, blessing and worship of God's name with absolute abasement of one's own name and honor, only so God is glorified, who is everything and from whom everything comes.

All that the Scriptures teach concerning God's glory and honor, concerning the gratitude which is his due, concerning the name of God and our joy in the Scriptures, pertains to this commandment.

Of the Third: Turning to God and seeking his grace, which is done by prayer, attention to the Sacrament and the Gospel, and meditation upon the passion of Christ. Thus a spiritual preparation for the Sacrament becomes possible; for this commandment requires a soul that is poor in Spirit and brings its poverty before God as its sacrifice. Thus he becomes its God, and his works and name take shape in the soul, as the first two commandments direct.

The requirements of this commandment embrace the whole of our duty in regard to the service of God, the preaching of the Word, good works and the relative importance of soul and body, so that all our works may be God's and not our own.

Of the Fourth: Cheerful obedience, humility, submission to all authority for the sake of God without gainsaying, murmuring and complaint, as the apostle Peter teaches.[17]

All that is taught in reference to patience, meekness, submissiveness and reverence, pertains to this commandment.

[17] 1 Pet. 4:9

Of the Fifth: Patience, meekness, kindness, love of peace, and always and everywhere a sweet and gracious heart which is free from hatred, passion and bitterness against any person whatever, not even enemies excepted.

All that is taught concerning patience, meekness, peace and concord pertains to this commandment.

Of the Sixth: Chastity, self-restraint, the manifestation of modesty in works and words, in thoughts and features, moderation in eating, drinking, in sleep and everything else that conduces to chastity.

To this commandment pertains all that is taught concerning chastity, fasting, sobriety, temperance, prayerfulness, vigilance, industry and all things that tend to purity.

Of the Seventh: Poverty of spirit, charity, willingness to lend and to give, a life free from avarice and greed.

To this commandment pertains all that is taught concerning avarice, unrighteous gain, usury, tricks of trade, fraud and any act whereby loss is caused to others or their welfare menaced.

Of the Eighth: A peaceable, benignant tongue which hurts no one and benefits everyone, which reconciles adversaries, excuses and defends the maligned, in short, a conversation informed by truth and free from subtilty.

Under this head belongs all that is taught concerning our duty to speak or to be silent when the honor of God, the rights, the cause and the salvation of our neighbor are at stake.

Of the Last Two: These enjoin absolute purity and an utter contempt for worldly pleasures and possessions. The perfect fulfilment of their requirements is possible only in the life to come.

All works performed in obedience to these commandments are inspired by love for others, a love which goes beyond self and embraces God and the neighbor. It does not seek its own interests, but those of God and the neighbor, freely offering itself to the service of everybody according to his need and pleasure.

It is evident, then, that in these commandments comprehensive and systematic information is given concerning all duties connected with man's life. An endeavor to perform them would mean to be occupied hour by hour with good works. This would render the performance of other, self-chosen, works and the running hither and thither in search of self-imposed tasks altogether superfluous.[18]

All this is demonstrated by the fact that in these commandments no instruction is given in reference to what man is to do or to abstain from for his own advantage, and in reference to his claims upon others. The instruction given is limited to his obligation, both negative and positive, in relation to God and his neighbor. Thus we cannot but understand that the fulfilment of these commandments does not stand in the love of self, but in the love of others. Man inclines of his own accord to have his own advantage in view in what he does, in what he avoids, in what he plans. That man lives the best life who lives not for himself; that man lives the worst life who lives for himself. Such is the teaching of the Ten Commandments, and in the light of this teaching it is seen how few there are who live as they ought. Yes, it is impossible for any man to live as he ought. Therefore, it is appropriate for us to learn in the next place where the strength for a good life and for the fulfilment of these commandments is to be found.

[18] E.g. practice of making vows, one which Luther was familiar with from his time as a monk.

Jesus.[19]

The Creed is divided into three parts, treating respectively of the three persons of the Holy Trinity: the first, of the Father; the second, of the Son; the third, of the Holy Spirit. The Creed contains the most important articles of faith. All other articles of belief depend upon them.

Observe that there are two ways of believing. In the first place, I may have a faith concerning God. This is the case when I hold to be true what is said concerning God. Such faith is on the same level with the assent I give to the statements concerning the Turk, the devil and hell. A faith of this kind should rather be called knowledge or information than faith.[20]

In the second place, there is faith in God. Such faith is mine when I not only hold to be true what is said concerning God, but when I put my trust in him in such a way as to enter into personal relations with him, believing firmly that I shall find him to be and to do as I

[19] PE 1, 25, n. 1 states that "In the original editions [of Luther's works] the word Jesus appears at the head of each of the works, ... which was apparently an act of obedience to the command [of Col. 3:17]."

[20] The idea here is that people receive reports that they then take to be true. This knowledge grows over time as it is filed away and is like a mental encyclopedia. For the historical context on the Turkish invasions see n. 18 in the unpublished preview on Luther's lectures on Obadiah of *Luther's Works: The Freely Given Edition.*

have been taught.[21] Not in the Turk do I believe thus, nor in any other man, however highly he may be praised. I may be readily induced to believe a man's piety, but that is no reason why I should build upon him. Such faith, which ventures everything upon what it has heard concerning God, be it life or death, constitutes the Christian man, and it receives everything of God it desires. Such a faith cannot tolerate a false and wicked heart; it is a living faith, such as the first commandment enjoins, which says: "I am thy God; thou shalt have no other gods." The word "in" is well chosen and deserving of due attention. We do not say, "I believe God the Father," or, "Concerning God the Father;" but, "In God the Father," "In Jesus Christ," "In the Holy Spirit." Such faith no one may claim but God alone, and it is a confession of the divinity of Christ and of the Holy Spirit that we believe in these as we believe in the Father. And inasmuch as the faith in one person of the Trinity is identical with that in the other two, it follows that the three persons are one God.

The First Article of the Creed.

"I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth."

This means that I renounce the evil spirit, all idolatry, all witchcraft, all false faith.

[21] This statement is in fact quite probing and participates in philosophical and theological discourses that stretch back to Paul and even Plato. Although very academic, see, for example, Sierksma-Agteres, Suzan *Paul and the Philosophers' Faith: Discourses of Pistis in the Graeco-Roman World* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2024), 393-395 and 485-486 for how the word faith has a semantic range that includes what we today might call trust or confidence, and that trust or confidence is placed in God who gives us knowledge of himself in his actions.

I place my confidence in no human being upon earth, nor even in myself, nor in my power, art, possessions, piety or anything I may have.

I put my trust in no creature, be it in heaven or upon earth.

I venture to put my trust in the one God, who has created heaven and earth and is above all creatures, although absolutely beyond my sight and ken; and, further, I am not dismayed by all the wickedness of the devil and his associates, for my God is above them all.

Though I should be forsaken and persecuted by all men, nevertheless I shall believe in God.

Although I may be poor and humble, unlearned and despised, yes, bereft of everything, I shall believe none the less in God.

I believe, even though I am a sinner; for far above all things that are and that are not—above all sin, all virtue, above all things, soars my faith, abiding in God pure and unsullied, as the first commandment enjoins upon me.

Nor will I tempt him by asking a sign of him.

No matter how long he tarries, I will trust in him. I will prescribe no bounds for him as to purpose, time, measure and method; in sincere and upright faith I leave all things to his divine will.

Since he is almighty, what can I lack that he is unable to give or perform?

Since he is the Creator of heaven and earth and Lord of all things, who will deprive me of anything or harm me? Indeed, how can all things fail to serve my welfare since I enjoy his favor, and all things are under his authority and control?

Being God, he possesses both the power and the wisdom to secure my highest welfare; being Father, he will surely do that which is best, and delight in doing so.

Inasmuch as I doubt none of these things, and put my trust in him, I am sure of being his child, servant and heir forever; and I shall receive even according to my faith.

The Second Article of the Creed.

"I believe in Jesus Christ, his only son, our Lord."

This means: I believe not only that Jesus Christ is eternal and divine by nature, being begotten in eternity as God's true and only Son, but also that he has received power over all things from the Father in that, according to his human nature, he has been appointed lord over myself and all creatures which, according to his divine nature, he has created with the Father.

I confess that no one can believe in the Father and find access to him through science, works, reason or anything that may be named in heaven and upon earth, except in and through Jesus Christ, his Son—through faith in his name and dominion.

"Conceived by the Holy Spirit."

I believe firmly that he was conceived by the Holy Spirit for my good, without the agency of man or of the flesh; without a natural father, or seed: and that he was so conceived for the purpose of purifying and making spiritual, through his and the almighty Father's gracious will, the sinful, carnal, impure and damnable conception of all those that believe in him.

"Born of the Virgin Mary."

I believe that he was born for me from Mary the pure virgin, without defilement of her bodily and spiritual virginity, to the end that he, according to the Father's merciful purpose, might render blessed, harmless and pure my birth, through which I became subject to sin and condemnation.

"Suffered under Pontius Pilate."

I believe that he has borne his sufferings and cross for my sins and the sins of all believers, whereby he has blessed every tribulation and every cross, thus rendering them beneficial and profitable.

"Was crucified, dead and buried."

I believe that he suffered death and burial in order to destroy and to bury my sins and those of all believers; and that thereby temporal death has been rendered harmless, profitable and salutary.

"He descended into hell."

I believe that he descended into hell in order to quench and to crush for my good and that of all believers, the devil and all his might, wiles and wickedness, thus breaking his power henceforth to harm me; and I believe that he has redeemed me from the torments of hell, rendering them harmless and profitable for me.

"The third day he rose again from the dead."

I believe that on the third day he rose from the dead in order to give me and all believers newness of life, thus awakening me by his grace and Spirit to a life in which I ever shun what is sinful and serve him in every grace and every virtue.

"He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty."

I believe that he ascended into heaven and has received from the Father power and honor above all angels and creatures; that he accordingly sits at the right hand of God; that is, that he is king and lord over all that belongs to God, whether it be in heaven, in hell or on earth. For this reason he can help me and all believers in every need, in defiance of all our adversaries and enemies.

"From thence he shall come to judge the living and the dead."

Thence, from heaven, he shall return on the last day, to judge the living that shall then be found on the earth, and the dead who meanwhile have passed away; I believe that all men, all angels and devils shall be haled before his judgment-seat and behold him face to face; and I believe that he shall deliver my body and those of all believers from death and every infirmity, that he shall mete out eternal punishment to our foes and adversaries and deliver us from their power forever.

The Third Article of the Creed.

"I believe in the Holy Spirit."

That is, I not only believe that the Holy Spirit, in his union with the Father and the Son, is truly God; I also believe that the coming to the Father through Christ, his life, passion and death, and whatever is related thereto, is rendered possible and obtained only through the agency of the Holy Spirit. Through Christ and in Christ, I am moved, aroused, invited and drawn to God. But the power through which this is done is the Holy Spirit, who restores me to life, holiness and a spiritual existence. Thus he brings me to the Father; for he is the power by which the Father, through and in Christ, works, and gives life.

"The holy Christian Church."

I believe that there exists on earth, throughout the entire world, but one holy universal Christian church, which is nothing else than the communion of saints—of the righteous and believing people on earth. And it is gathered, preserved and governed by the Holy Spirit, and daily increased by means of the Sacraments and the Word of God.

I believe that no one can be saved unless he is found in this communion, is in hearty fellowship with her and makes her faith, her Word, her Sacrament, her love, his own. I believe that no Jew, no heretic, no heathen or any of her adversaries can find salvation unless he has been reconciled and restored to fellowship and concord with this Church in all things.

"The communion of saints."

I believe that in this Christian communion all things are in common, and that no one has exclusive possession of his own. For this reason I, and every believer, must be benefited, succored and strengthened by the prayers and good works of the entire communion at all times, in life and in death. Thus each bears the burdens of the other, as Saint Paul teaches in Galatians 6:2.

"The forgiveness of sins."

I believe that in this communion, but nowhere else, there is forgiveness of sin; that outside her pale there is no provision for the forgiveness of sin, however numerous and conspicuous good works may be; that the number, the greatness and the frequency of sins within her pale cannot override the provision existing for forgiveness as long as this one communion abides. To her Christ gives the keys, saying: "Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven." Matt. 18:18. The same in substance is said by Christ to Peter, an individual, as the representative of each true church, "Whatever you bind," etc. Matt. 16:19.

"The resurrection of the body."

I believe that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, when, through the same Holy Spirit, there shall be an awakening of all flesh. I believe that all mankind, both the good and the wicked, shall arise in the body; that the very flesh which has died and been buried, which has perished and in many ways been destroyed, shall return and be made alive.

"And the life everlasting."

I believe that the resurrection shall be succeeded by an everlasting life on the part of believers, and an everlasting death on the part of sinners.

"Amen."

And in no way do I doubt that the Father, through his Son Jesus Christ, our Lord, and the power of the Holy Spirit, will cause me to experience all these things. This is what is meant by the word "Amen," which signifies that these things are certain and shall surely come to pass. [22]

[22] The Hebrew word אָמֵן ("Amen") translates to "so be it" or "may it be so." Luther held that by ending a prayer with 'Amen' that we affirm our belief that it is heard by and entrusted to God.

III. The Lord's Prayer.

The Cry of Faith.

"Our Father Who art in Heaven."

The Meaning: O Almighty God, through your endless mercy you have permitted us to come to you, commanding and teaching us, through your dear Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, that we, through his merits and mediatorship, shall call and look upon you as Father; although you can, in all justice, be a severe judge over us sinners, who have sinned so much and so grievously against your holy and most precious will and have called forth your anger.

But because of these your mercies we pray that you will, through the same grace, put into our hearts the comforting assurance of your paternal love, and permit us to taste the sweetness of that childlike assurance which joyfully calls you "Father," and loves you and calls upon you in every time of trouble. Guard us that we may remain your children, and permit not our guilt to change you, most loving Father, into a terrible judge, and ourselves, your children, into your enemies.

You desire us to call you not only "Father," but also "Our Father," and thus in brotherly unity to pray for all your children. Therefore, give us unity and brotherly love, that we may recognize each other as true brothers and sisters, and pray to you as our common and dear Father for each of the brotherhood of mankind, as one child pleads with its father on behalf of the other.

Let none among us seek at your throne his own advantage and forget his neighbor's good. May we lay aside all hatred, envy and contentions and live with each other as true and righteous children of

God, so that in this fellowship we may be able to say not merely "My Father," but "Our Father."

You are not an earthly father to us, one who is in this world. You are in heaven, a spiritual Father. You can never die. You are never perplexed and helpless, as is our father according to the flesh here below. You thus show us that you are an immeasurably better father, thus teaching us to despise, in comparison with you, earthly fatherhood, homeland, friends, possessions and whatever is flesh and blood.

Grant us, then, O Father, that we likewise may be your heavenly children. Teach us to care only for our souls and our heavenly inheritance. May we not become children of this world in that our earthly homeland and inheritance deceive, infatuate or hinder us. Thus shall we be able in truth to say: "Our heavenly Father." Then shall we truly be your heavenly children.

The First Petition.

"Hallowed be Thy Name."

The Meaning: O Almighty God, dear heavenly Father, we deplore the fact that your holy name is often profaned, blasphemed and dishonored in this wretched vale of tears. It is put to many uses where your honor has no part. It is abused in many ways in sin. A shameless life is truly a disgrace and a dishonor to your holy name.

Bestow upon us, then, your divine grace, that we may guard against all things which do not tend to the honor and praise of your holy name. Grant that all witchcraft and false blessings may be put away. Grant that your name may cease to be used to conjure the devil's or any creature's help. Grant that all unbelief and superstition may be rooted out; that heresy and false doctrine parading in your name may come to naught. Grant that falsehood, when decked as truth, piety or holiness, may deceive no one.

Grant that none may curse, lie or deceive by your name. Protect us against false comfort devised in your name. Protect us against all spiritual pride and the empty honor of earthly glory and fame. Teach us, in our every need and affliction, to call upon your holy name. Teach us, in the anguish of conscience and in the hour of death, not to forget your name. Grant that all our possessions, words and deeds may be used alone to your praise and honor. May we use none of these things for ourselves; for they all are yours. Guard us against the shameful vice of ingratitude.

Grant that through our good works and life all others may be induced to praise, not us, but you in us, and to honor your name. Grant that our evil deeds or infirmities may cause no one to take offense, to the dishonor of your name or to the neglect of your praise. Let us desire nothing, either for time or for eternity, which is not consistent with the praise and glory of your name; and if we should pray for these things, then heed not our folly. Grant that our lives may be such as to prove that we are the true children of God, so that your fatherly name may not be falsely or in vain proclaimed to us. Amen.

All psalms and prayers to God's praise, all songs of thanksgiving and the entire Hallelujah are forms of this petition.

The Second Petition.

"Thy Kingdom Come."

The Meaning: This wretched life is a kingdom of all sin and wickedness. Its master is the evil spirit, the source and chief contriver of every kind of wickedness and sin. But your kingdom is a kingdom of all grace and of all virtues. The Lord Jesus Christ, your dear Son, in whom is found, and by whom is given, every grace and virtue, is its ruler. Grant us, then, above all things a true and abiding faith in Christ and an unshaken hope in your mercy, so that we may overcome the dread of our sinful consciences. Work in us a devoted love for you and

for all men. Guard us against unbelief and despair, and against being possessed of envy.

Protect us against the filthy desires of unchastity, and help us to preserve the virginity and purity of our souls and bodies. Deliver us from contentions, from war and discord, and grant us the blessings of your kingdom: peace, concord, and unbroken quiet. May, by your help, neither anger nor any other kind of bitterness cause the downfall of this kingdom within us, but may, through your grace, unmixed sweetness and brotherly devotion, kindliness, moderation and meekness rule in us. Let not our hearts be surcharged with grief and sorrow, but let joy and pleasure in your grace fill our souls.

Finally, grant us deliverance from all sin; may we, strong in your grace, in virtue and good works, become your kingdom; thus shall our hearts, minds and thoughts, and all our powers, inwardly and outwardly, most humbly submit to your commandments, and do your will; and, being governed by you alone, we shall cease following the flesh, the world and the devil.

Cause your kingdom which has begun in us to grow, and daily to strengthen its hold upon us, to the end that we may be safe from the deceptions of wickedness, from indifference to your service and from backsliding. Grant that we may be influenced by the serious purpose not only to make a start in godliness, but to persevere therein, and to attain its consummation, as the prophet has said: "Give light to my eyes, lest I sleep in death, lest my enemy say, 'I have overcome him,' and my foes rejoice when I fall." Ps 13:3-4.

Grant that we may remain steadfast, and that your kingdom which is to come may perfect and complete your kingdom here begun in us. Deliver us from this sinful life, so full of perils. Arouse in us the longing for the life to come and scorn for the life that now is. Help us not to fear death, but to welcome it. Release us from the fetters and love which bind us to the present life, that we may realize the fullness of your kingdom.

The psalms, hymns and prayers in which we ask God for grace and virtue may be classed with this petition.

The Third Petition.

"Thy Will be Done, as in Heaven, so on Earth."

The Meaning: Our will as opposed to your will is never good. It is at all times wicked. Your will is always the best. It is to be loved and to be desired above all things. Therefore, have mercy upon us, O loving Father, and never give us our will in anything. Grant and teach us perfect and complete patience when our will is defeated or hindered. When one crosses our will by anything that he may say or leave unsaid, by anything that he may do or leave undone, help us not to become enraged and angered, and, in that state of mind, to curse, complain, scold, judge, condemn or strive. When our will is opposed or hindered by others, may we, by your help, humbly yield to them, and, instead of resisting them, praise, bless and favor them as those who carry out your divine will over against our own.

Give us grace cheerfully to bear disease, poverty, reproach, suffering and adversity, and help us to recognize that these things are sent because it is your divine will that we therein crucify our own will. Make us willing to endure injustice, and restrain us from taking vengeance. Suffer us not to repay evil with evil, to oppose violence with violence, but rather to find our pleasure in your will which sends the trials, and thus praise and thank you. Let us not place that which befalls us contrary to your will at the door of Satan or wicked men, but recognize in it your divine will which directs all things for the purpose of increasing our happiness in your kingdom by hindering our will.

Grant that we may willingly and cheerfully enter into death, accepting it as your will; so that we may not disobey you by impatience and despair. Restrain the desire of our members—our eyes, our

tongues, our hearts, our hands and feet. Suffer them not to have their own will. Make them subject to your will, firmly held and subdued therein. Protect us against all wicked, rebellious, hard-hearted, stiff-necked and stubborn self-will.

Give us true obedience, perfect and unquestioning submission in all things, spiritual and terrestrial, eternal and temporal. Preserve us from the abominable vices of back-biting, slandering, gossiping, unmercifully judging, condemning others, or striving with them. Save us from the calamity and the evil of such a tongue. When we see or hear anything on the part of others which arouses our censure or indignation, teach us to be silent, to cover it, to bring our complaints before you alone and to leave everything to your will, thus manifesting forgiveness and sympathy toward those who sin against us.

Teach us that no one can harm us without harming himself at the same time a thousand times more in your sight. Thus may we be rather moved to mercy than to anger; to pity than to resentment. Help us not to rejoice at the misfortune of those who do not as we approve or who have done us harm, or have, by something in their lives, given us displeasure. Help us, on the other hand, never to begrudge them success.

Under this petition may be classed those psalms and prayers in which we ask help against the secret sins and enemies in our hearts.

The Fourth Petition.

"Give Us this Day Our Daily Bread."

The Meaning: This bread is our Lord Jesus Christ, who feeds and comforts our souls. Therefore, O heavenly Father, grant us your grace that the life of Christ, his Word, work and passion may be proclaimed to us and all the world; yes, that we and all the world may appropriate and ever keep these blessings. Let his Word and work be throughout our lives a powerful example and a mirror of all virtues. Grant that in

suffering and adversity we may find strength and comfort in his suffering and cross. Through his death may we in firm faith vanquish our death and thus fearlessly follow our beloved leader into the life beyond.

Grant that by your grace all preachers may proclaim Christ and your Word with power and blessing in all the world. Enable all hearers of your Word to learn to know Christ and truly thereby to amend their lives. Graciously expel from your holy Church every alien message and doctrine in which Christ is not taught. Show your mercy to all bishops, priests, ministers and rulers, that they, enlightened by your grace, may rightly instruct and guide us by word and example. And should the example of any ruler be evil, safeguard those of weak faith against offense.

Protect us from heretical and apostate teachers, so that the bread of the unalloyed doctrine and Word of Christ may be preserved to us. May we, by your grace, rightly contemplate the sufferings of Christ, lay hold of them in sincerity, and experience their blessing in our lives. Let us not be deprived, in our last hour, of the blessings of Christ's death. Grant that all pastors may administer the blessed Sacraments worthily, to the end that all Christendom may grow stronger thereby. Grant that we and all Christians, when our time has come, may, by your grace, receive the holy Sacrament unto salvation. And, finally, give us our daily bread, that Christ may remain in us and we in him, and that the name "Christians," which we have received from him, may not be borne by us to our shame.

Under this petition come all prayers or psalms uttered in behalf of rulers, and especially those asking deliverance from false teachers, Jews, heretics and any who err in teaching of any kind; and also those uttered in behalf of the troubled and disconsolate.

The Fifth Petition.

"And Forgive Us Our Debts, as We also Have Forgiven Our Debtors."

The Meaning: To this petition the condition is attached that we are first to forgive our debtors. When we have done this, then we can say, "Forgive us our debts." Above, in the third petition, we prayed that God's will be done; for it is his purpose that we should suffer all things patiently, not return evil for evil, nor seek to avenge ourselves, but should return good for evil after the manner of our Father in heaven, who causes his sun to rise over the good and the wicked and sends his rain upon those who thank him and those who do not. Matt. 5:45. Hence we pray thus: "O Father, now and in our last hour give comfort to our consciences, dismayed as they are and shall be by our sins and by thy judgment. Grant to our hearts your peace; so shall we await your judgment with joy. Do not judge us with severity, for in your judgment no man shall be justified." Ps. 143:2. Teach us, dear Father, not to trust in ourselves nor to seek comfort in ourselves by looking to our own work or merit, but in sincerity and with firm resolve to consign ourselves to your mercy and to build upon that alone. Likewise, let us not despair on account of our blameworthy, sinful life; let us value your mercy as higher, wider and stronger than all our life.

Help all men who are in mortal danger and in the distress of despair, especially our particular friend N. or N.[23] Forgive them and us all our debts; comfort them and let them be acceptable unto you according to your mercy.

Return your grace for our wickedness, as you have commanded us to do. Now and in our last hour, and in all anguish of conscience, silence the evil spirit, our vile slanderer, accuser and exaggerator of our

[23] This was the customary way of writing a stand-in name for the generic individual in Luther's time. The idea was that it could be anyone.

sins. Likewise, we shall give due heed lest we slander others and exaggerate their sins. Do not judge us according to the accusations of the devil and of a wretched conscience. Do not listen to the voice of our accusers, who accuse us before you day and night, as we shall not listen to those who slander and accuse others.

Relieve us from the heavy burden of sin and an evil conscience; so, trusting in your mercy, we shall live and die, suffer and labor, with light and joyful hearts.

Under this petition come all psalms, hymns and prayers in which we appeal to God for mercy upon our sins.

The Sixth Petition.

"And Bring Us Not into Temptation."

The Meaning: There is a three-fold source of temptation, or trial; the flesh, the world, the devil. For this reason we pray: Dear Father, grant us grace that we may conquer the lusts of our flesh. Help us in our efforts to exercise moderation in reference to eating and drinking, and also in the enjoyment of sleep, leisure and diversion. Help us to train and discipline the flesh for good works through fasting, moderation in food, dress and recreation, by industry, by watching and prayer. The evil propensity of the flesh toward unchastity, all its desires and promptings may we destroy, nailing them to the cross with Christ; so we shall withstand and spurn its temptation. When we behold beauty in the shape of a human form, of a painting or of any creature whatever, may we not experience temptation, but make use of the occasion to prize purity and to behold your praise in your creatures. When anything sweet comes to our ears, or anything pleasant to our senses, may we see therein not the opportunity of desire, but an occasion of singing your praise and glory.

Protect us against the great evil of avarice and against the desire for the riches of this world. Save us from seeking worldly honor and

power, yes, from the very desire for them. May the world's duplicity, her false show and blandishments, never beguile us. May the troubles and adversities in the world not provoke us to impatience, revenge, anger or other faults. Let us, by your aid, renounce and forsake the lies and deceptions of the world, her promises, her falseness, her good things and evil things; let us do this with a determination that shall grow stronger day by day.

Guard us against all suggestions of the devil, that we may not despise you by pride, self-complacency or like faults, in consequence of wealth, noble descent, accomplishments, personal beauty or other blessings which you have bestowed. Let us not, from any cause whatever, fall victims to hate and envy. And, when our faith is tried, now and in our last hour, let us not fall into despair.

We commend to you, heavenly Father, all those who struggle against temptation, no matter in what form it makes its assault. Come to the rescue of those who are still standing. Raise once more those prostrate from their fall. Grant us your grace, that in this wretched and uncertain life, in which numerous foes ceaselessly surround us, we may bravely fight, nerved by a strong, valiant faith, and thus obtain the eternal crown.[24]

The Seventh Petition.

"But Deliver Us from Evil."

The Meaning: This petition is first of all an entreaty for deliverance from evil in the form of pain or penalty. The holy Church voices it in her litanies:[25] Deliver us, O Father, from your eternal wrath and the

[24] 1 Cor. 9:25

[25] Luther would later revise the Litany of All Saints in both German and Latin by 1529 when it was reinstituted at Wittenberg after Karlstadt's reforms of 1521/22 (WA 30^{III}, [1] 29-42). Many similarities could still be found between the two as a comparison reveals.

torments of hell. In death and on the last day, deliver us from the severity of your judgment. From a cruel, sudden death, deliver us. Protect us against flood and fire, lightning and hail. Protect us against famine and want. Protect us against war and bloodshed against plague and pestilence; against the French and all other evils protect us. Protect us against all bodily ills and distress whenever such favor accords with the honor of thy name, the growth of thy kingdom and with your divine will.

"Amen."

Grant us, O God, the sure fulfilment of all our petitions. Permit us not to doubt that you have heard us and shall hear us again, since our petitions are 'yes' with thee, and not 'no' or uncertain. Therefore we say cheerfully, "Amen;" this is true and certain; Amen.